Developing a Research Framework Model for Assessing the Impact of Social Media Marketing Activities on Brand Loyalty

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Keywords: Social Media Marketing Activities, Consumer-Brand Relationship, Brand Loyalty, Hospitality, Research Framework.

Abstract: The rapid growth of internet of things has driven a shift in consumer behaviour, prompting businesses to adopt social media as a vital communication channel. In the hospitality sector, social media marketing activities （SMMA）is the cornerstone in business management, marketing research and brand promotion, however, there is a scarcity of research on the comparative effectiveness of social media strategies within this industry. This study seeks to fill this gap by establishing a research framework that examine the connections among SMMA, the consumer-brand relationship (CBR), and brand loyalty (BL) in a systemic way. Specifically, the research model, draws on the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) framework, proposed that factors like entertainment, interaction, customization, trendiness, and word of mouth (WOM) can bolster the CBR and subsequently boost brand loyalty. Moreover, the study considers the mediating and moderating roles of CBR, gender and age in the relationship to social media stimuli and user behaviour. The study's outcomes can be utilized as a solid foundation to host future empirical investigations aiding in the optimization of marketing strategies and the preservation of a competitive advantage in the digital landscape.

1 INTRODUCTION

The development of digital economy has brought significant changes in consumer behaviour of internet users. This global shift is rapidly making the use of social media as a new tool of communication, both possible as well as necessary for companies.

Under this prism, the application of the internet and social media alters consumer behavior, hence challenging the overall way of conducting business (Dwivedi et al., 2021). As of April 2024, there were 5.44 billion internet users worldwide, representing 67.1 percent of the global population. Of this number, 5.07 billion, or 62.6 percent of the world's population, were social media users. Asia had the largest number of online users globally, with over 2.93 billion, followed by Europe with around 750 million internet users. China, India, and the United States lead the world in the number of internet users (Petrosyan, 2024).

In the hospitality industry, social media serve as a critical strategic tool of marketing research and brand promotion (Leung et al., 2013). They are essential for enhancing customer engagement through attractive, high-quality, and interactive content (Yoong and Lian, 2019), as well as for improving customer experience and building relationships (Verissimo and Menezes, 2015). Additionally, social media marketing (SMM) plays a pivotal role in the hospitality industry by engaging existing and potential consumers with the ultimate objective being gaining their loyalty (Beqiri. and Qenaj, 2022). Social media marketing activities (SMMA) can be defined as the specific actions that implement the social media marketing strategy (F. Li et al., 2021). These

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activities include sales, advertising as well as costumer service(Baines et al., 2021).

While studies on Hallyu tourism (Chung and Jeong, 2024) and customer engagement in social media (de Oliveira Santini et al., 2020) offer insights, they neglected the specific nuances of SMMA in the hospitality industry. This study, grounded in the Stimulus- Organism-Response (SOR)model, targets a unique aspect of SMMA not addressed by existing theories or meta-analyses, aiming to understand the impact of SMMA on brand loyalty within the industry. Specifically, previous research in tourism (J. Liu et al., 2022), retailing (Safeer, 2024), and airlines (Ibrahim, 2021b; Khan et al., 2024) has primarily focused on examining the relationship between social media marketing activities and their direct outcomes, such as brand trust, satisfaction, and loyalty. However, dimensions of the consumer-brand relationship (CBR), such as brand love and brand attachment, have not been systematically examined in the hospitality industry (Ibrahim et al., 2021a, Kumar and Hsieh, 2024). Hence, little empirical work has been conducted to understand how SMMA influence brand loyalty through CBR.

Based on this literature gap, this research aims to establish a research agenda that sets the directions towards in-depth investigation on the relationships among SMMA, CBR, and brand loyalty, holistically, responding in this way to the calls of Kumar (S. Kumar and Hsieh, 2024) and Anas (Anas et al., 2023), which point out the need for investations that examine the impact of SMMA on brand loyalty.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

As technology is advancing constantly, the Internet has evolved from a purely broadcast medium to a participatory platform that allows people to become the "media" themselves, since it provides the functionalities for freely information sharing (X. Li and Wang, 2011). As a result, through the development of social media, single individuals can now share their experiences with products and companies to hundreds or thousands of others.

In recent years, social media have sparked a revolution and emerged as an essential marketing tool across all sectors, due to their substantial growth rate (Islam, 2021). From a marketing perspective, social media have transformed traditional practices by facilitating two-way information exchange (J. Park and Oh, 2012). Appel et al. (2020) suggested that social media have become a vital marketing weapon

and communications channel for businesses, organizations, and institutions, as well as consumers.

As stated in the introduction, social media marketing activities (SMMA) are the specific actions that implement the social media marketing strategy. Different scholars have presented different social media marketing activities that vary based on the industry. The main conceptualizations are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Main Conceptualizations of SMMA across Various Industries.

SMMA	Industry Sector	Scholar
Entertainment Interaction Customization Trendiness Word of mouth	Luxury Fashion	Kim and Ko (2012)
Interaction Trendiness Customization Perceived risk	Insurance Services	Sano (2015)
Informativeness Trendiness Interactivity Personalization Word of mouth	E-commerce	Yadav and Rahman (2017)
Entertainment Interaction Trendiness Customization Perceived risk	Airline industry	Seo and Park (2018)

In the rapidly evolving landscape of hospitality, social media marketing has become a pivotal tool to engage with customers, build brand loyalty, and drive revenue. The effectiveness of these marketing activities is crucial for the success of hospitality in a highly competitive market. To assess and enhance the impact of social media marketing in the hospitality industry, this research proposes to apply Kim and Ko's (2012) five-dimension framework (entertainment, ccustomization, interaction, WOM, and trendiness), which has been successfully adapted and utilized in various industries, showcasing its versatility and applicability (Godey et al., 2016; Zollo et al., 2020). The hospitality industry, characterized by its emphasis on customer experience and service quality (Ali et al., 2021; Hemmington, 2007), aligns well with the dimensions of the proposed model. The dimension of entertainment is vital for generating content that captivates guests and nurtures a brand community (Bazi et al., 2023). Social media interaction encompasses a two-way communication process, which is essential for establishing strong customer relationships (Lacap et al., 2024).

Trendiness allows hotels to stay current with the latest industry trends and consumer preferences, ensuring that their offerings remain appealing (Anita et al., 2023).Customization, facilitated by AI in the hospitality industry, allows for the alignment of products and services with guest preferences, thereby enhancing customer satisfaction and market competitiveness (Manoharan et al., 2024). Lastly, Word of mouth (WOM) is particularly potent in the hospitality industry, where positive reviews and recommendations can significantly influence booking decisions (Gellerstedt and Arvemo, 2019). This integrated approach to social media marketing, as outlined by the framework, is poised to enhance the strategic positioning and performance of hospitality.

Social media platforms enhance customer relationship management by enabling real-time interactions between firms and consumers and allow aggressive advertising in target markets. Ample studies have previously examined the impact of social media on consumer relationships. For instance, Sultan and Khan (2022) noted that social media significantly impact branding by encouraging users to share personal stories and brand-related details within their social networks. Consumer-brand relationships (CBR), as defined by Blackston (1992) and Chang and Chieng (2006), are characterized as bonds that form either spontaneously through consumer initiative or through mutually dependent interactions. According to Ashley and Tuten (2015), CBR are integral part not only to a brand's communication strategy and marketing activities, but also to its ability to forge enduring emotional connections with consumers through digital platforms, including social media.

Fournier (1998) proposed a Brand Relationship Quality (BRQ) model consisting of six dimensions: love and passion, self-connection, interdependence, commitment, intimacy, and partner quality. The BRQ model offers a framework for understanding the quality of relationships between consumers and brands, as well as assessing the strength and durability of these relationships. Over the years, scholars tend to enrich this initial conceptualization by providing additional constructs on the model such as: brand attachment (Y. Liu et al., 2020; C. W. Park et al., 2010), brand love (Palusuk et al., 2019), self-brand connection (Escalas and Bettman, 2003; Hamzah et al., 2021), brand identification (V. Kumar and Kaushik, 2018), and brand trust (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001; Jain et al., 2018; Khamitov et al., 2019). Existing research consistently identifies these constructs as predictors of loyalty, forming the foundation of CBR (Albert and Thomson, 2018; Khamitov et al., 2019). The highly competitive hospitality industry, which relies heavily on guest loyalty, stands to gain significantly from understanding how CBR influences brand loyalty in its context (Alizadeh and Nazarpour Kashani, 2022). Therefore, this study aims to investigate the impact of the five constructs of CBR on brand loyalty within the hospitality industry, identifying key factors in the formation of brand loyalty and aligning with the theoretical framework and practical application of CBR.

One of the strategic objectives of marketing activities is to create loyalty through branding. Initially, scholars generally refer to brand loyalty as consumers' repeated purchase behaviour for a specific brand (Guest, 1944; Harary and Lipstein, 1962; Tucker, 1964). While this initial definition is still relevant and valuable, in the recent years the definition of brand loyalty has developed into a multi-dimensional concept, including also the dimensions of trust as well as preference. Scholars have increasingly focused on the mechanisms behind brand loyalty, examining how factors such as consumer satisfaction (Ha et al., 2009; Oliver, 1999; Punniyamoorthy and Prasanna Mohan Raj, 2007), service quality (Alexandris et al., 2008; Reich et al., 2006; Zehir et al., 2011) and brand image (Alić et al., 2020; Keller, 2001) affect consumers' loyalty behaviour.

The Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR)model, grounded in environmental psychology and initially proposed by Mehrabian and Russell in 1974, is utilized to illustrate how external environmental stimuli (S) influence an individual's internal state (O), leading to particular behavioural responses (R) (Mehrabian and Russell, 1974). It is a prominent model in consumer behaviour research, particularly in the field of social media marketing. This model plays a vital role in discussing the relationships among SMMA, brand equity (Peng et al., 2024), brand experience (S. Kumar and Hsieh, 2024),brand loyalty (Changani and Kumar, 2023), purchase intention (Ho et al. 2024) and E-WOM(Seo and Park, 2018).This research employs the SOR model for three reasons. First, it provides a theoretical framework that facilitates a systematic analysis of SMMA as external stimuli (S) impacting CBR as the organism (O). Second, the model elucidates the transformation of these internal states into behavioural responses (R), specifically brand loyalty. Finally, the SOR model's extensive application and recognition in the domain of consumer behaviour research, ensure its reliability as a proven framework for examining and interpreting consumer behaviours within the social media contexts.

Conclusively, the proposed theoretical framework synthesises the SOR model with Kim and Ko's five-dimensional framework, providing a comprehensive

examination of the effects of SMMA on brand loyalty within the hospitality industry. It delineates the pivotal dimensions of CBR and elucidates their potential to influence loyalty, thereby offering a robust analytical tool for understanding and predicting consumer behaviour in this context.

3 A FRAMEWORK MODEL FOR ASSESSING THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING ACTIVITIES ON BRAND LOYALTY

3.1 The Need for the Model

Previous studies on SMMA have mostly focused on the fashion retail brands(Safeer, 2024), property(Ho et al., 2024) and airlines industries (Khan et al., 2024),with limited empirical research on how SMMA affects brand loyalty via the mediating role of CBR in the hospitality industry. The complex interplay between SMMA, CBR, and brand loyalty remains underexplored in the literature, highlighting a critical research need for both conceptual and empirical investigations into these interactions.

Addressing this gap, the study aims to develop a comprehensive model that outlines a clear research agenda, focusing on the elements that drive customer behaviour with an emphasis on brand loyalty. This model is essential for deciphering the mechanisms through which SMMA can strengthen brand loyalty by leveraging CBR, and it provides a strategic blueprint for the hospitality industry to enhance its marketing efforts.

As illustrated in Figure 1, the proposed model serves a quadruple purpose: (1) identifying the critical components of SMMA that drive CBR, (2) demonstrating the mediating effect of CBR on the relationship between SMMA and brand loyalty, (3) examining the moderating influence of gender and age in the SMMA-brand loyalty relationship, and (4) providing a practical guide for hospitality marketers.
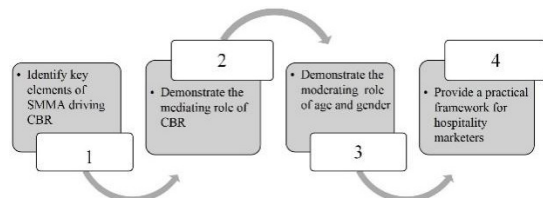

Figure 1: Proposed Framework Model Objectives.

3.2 The Proposed Model

This model, has its intellectual roots on SOR framework, that aims to examine the impact of SMMA, including entertainment, interaction, customization, trendiness, and WOM, as external stimuli on the CBR. By doing so, the research seeks to enhance our understanding of how these activities can foster brand loyalty.

Building on the findings of previous research (Bushara et al., 2023; Ibrahim and Aljarah, 2021; Khan et al., 2024; Sohaib et al., 2024), this study adopts the SOR model to investigate the intrinsic relationships among SMMA, CBR, and BL within the hospitality industry. The proposed model is depicted in Figure 2.
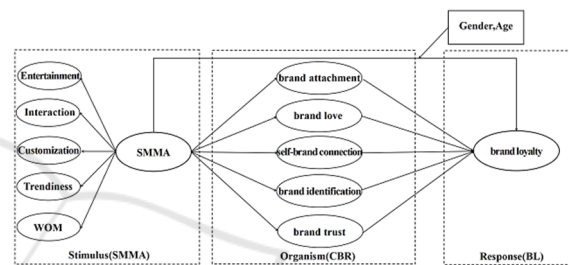

Figure 2: The Proposed Framework Model.

As it is proposed to the model, SMMA are used as external stimuli (S), CBR is used as a regulatory mechanism (O), and brand loyalty, represent the response (R) as the ultimate outcome. Specifically, SMMA provide hotel information, customer reviews, promotional activities and other content to form an initial stimulus to consumers (S). After receiving this information, consumers will evaluate the service quality and brand image of the hotel, based on their own knowledge framework, needs, and expectations. In this process, CBR plays a vital role (O), which can not only enhance consumers' trust in the hotel, but also improve consumers' satisfaction through personalized service and care. BL is the final behavioural response (R), which reflects consumers' continued preference for hotel brands and willingness to repurchase. The effective use of social media and high-quality customer relationship management work together to form and enhance brand loyalty.

By applying this proposed model, scholars and practitioners will be able to answer the following research questions:

RQ 1 What is the impact of SMMA on CBR, and which dimension of SMMA has the greatest influence?

RQ2 How do CBR influence BL, and which dimension of CBR has the greatest impact on BL?

RQ3 What is the mediating role of CBR in the relationship between SMMA and BL?

RQ4 What is the moderating role of gender and age in the relationship between SMMA and BL?

4 CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study is to establish research agenda that captures the interactions among social media marketing activities, customer brand relationship, and brand loyalty in a systemic manner. As a result, a conceptual framework is proposed. The framework makes a substantial contribution to both the academic literature and the practical strategies of the hospitality industry. Specifically, it proposed the application of the SOR model in the context of hospitality sector, offering a novel approach of integrating social media marketing activities with the dimensions of the consumer-brand relationship. This integration deepens the understanding of the dynamics between brands and consumers in the digital economy, and offers both theoretical insights and practical implications for enhancing brand loyalty through social media specific activities.

Furthermore, the study acknowledges the importance of quantitative research in establishing causal relationships. While the current research lays the conceptual groundwork, it also highlights the necessity for empirical investigation to quantify the effects of social media marketing activities on CBR and brand loyalty. Subsequent research will involve a quantitative study to determine the precise relationships among the variables in the proposed framework. This quantitative approach will be key to measuring the impact of social media stimuli on user behavior, considering the moderating effects of gender and age. This nuanced understanding will facilitate a more informed approach to social media marketing strategies, tailored to the diverse needs and preferences of different demographic segments.

In summary, this research presents a robust and applicable framework that seeks to elucidate the critical role of social media marketing in the hospitality industry. The findings aim to set the foundation for future empirical research. The recommendations provided will be further refined through quantitative analysis, offering practitioners evidence-based strategies to optimize their marketing efforts and maintain a competitive edge in the digital marketplace.

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